1977

Midwest China Oral History Interviews

John Foster

JOHN FOSTER

ORAL HISTORY ABSTRACT

BORN: 1911 in Faribault, Minnesota.

EARLY BACKGROUND: education; called by Episcopalian Church to teach English at Boone College, Wuchang, 1934.

CHINA EXPERIENCES: description of students, faculty at Boone College; memories of Anna Louise Strong and Agnes Smedley; participates in relief mission to Eighth Route Army organized by Agnes Smedley, 1938; works with hospital in Liaohsien; activities in Chungking and Chengtu with INDUSCO, the China Defense League, and the U.S. Information Service (USIS); opens USIS office in Hankow, 1945; experiences with USIS in post-war China; trip to China, 1975; response to missionaries and the missionary movement; racial prejudice in China; response to American diplomacy in China; the National Peasant Movement Institute in Canton; memories of Feng Yu-hsiang.

INTERVIEWER: Sarah Refo Mason

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PLACE: Mankato, Minnesota

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INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: I am talking with John Foster, in Mankato, Minnesota. I believe you grew up in this part of the state. To begin, could you give us some background on your childhood in Faribault, Minnesota?

FOSTER: I was born in Faribault in 1911. It was the year of the first Chinese Revolution under Sun Yat-sen. I went to school there and lived in Faribault until I graduated from Shattuck School in 1929. My father had been the football coach and a teacher at Shattuck, and my mother was an English teacher at St. Mary's Hall. Both are Episcopal schools in Faribault. After their marriage, my father started a real estate business in Faribault, and also an insurance agency. There was really no contact with anything Chinese at all while I was growing up in Faribault.

I: Did you know any China missionaries?

FOSTER: Not China missionaries, particularly, no.

I: But other missionaries?

FOSTER: There were people connected with the Army at Shattuck who had been all over the world. It was more of a military connection.

I: Oh, that is interesting. Many missionaries heard, as children, missionaries who had returned talking about their China experiences, but yours were military.

FOSTER: I had always wanted to go either to China, Spain, or Mexico to live. I went to college at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, which is a Quaker college. There wasn't much Chinese influence there except for two students from China, with whom I became acquainted and liked very much.

After I graduated from Swarthmore, it was hard to get a job teaching English or studying English. I went to Yale Divinity School for a year--largely to find out what I wanted to do. I roomed there with the son of the dean, Dean Luther Weigel. The son's name was Dick and he had just come back from two years of teaching in China in Changsha with Yale-in-China. When he came back to the United States, he went to Yale Divinity School, also to find out what he wanted to do. Dick was on the board of the college--Huachung College--which was a union of five small colleges that had existed in Central China. One was Yale-in-China, and one was Boone College, run by the Episcopal Church.

My roommate knew that the college was looking for an English teacher and the salary would be paid by the Episcopal Church. I wanted to teach English and was a communicant of the Episcopal Church at that time. So I applied for the job and eventually got it, but not until the end of the summer. This was during the depression and the church had trouble raising enough money. But they finally decided they would send me out. By that time I was in Pittsburgh, working. I had known a girl in college who had an aunt who was a Presbyterian missionary in Peking, so I had heard about China through her, too. So it was partly through her encouragement, also, that I went to China.

I: What was your salary to be?

FOSTER: $810 U.S. money. It should have been $900 for a beginning missionary, but there was a 10 percent cut. What really impressed me was that everybody got exactly the same salary, based on years of service. Oh, they did have definite

raises. I found, when you got married, you got a raise in salary; and for every child up to five, you got an increase in salary. One of the things that always seemed unjust to me was that they wouldn't let you get married until you passed the language exam. This meant that you had to learn the radicals in order and be able to recite them. I worked very hard on this one. I learned them and then they thought of some other reason why I couldn't get married.

I: What year did you go to China?

FOSTER: It was 1934 when I went out. And I actually met this aunt of my friend, in Peking. The aunt had been there at the time of the Boxer Rebellion, it seems to me, if that is possible. Yes, that would have been possible. She told me stories about that and she was very interesting.

I: Was she in the legations with the other Westerners?

FOSTER: I don't really remember that. I think she might have been out in the country someplace.

I: What were your first reactions and what was the reception like at Huachung?

FOSTER: In Shanghai, when I got off the ship, something happened right there. I bought a book by Latourette. Kenneth Scott Latourette was a professor at Yale Divinity School, and I had studied with him. He had written the standard history of Chinese culture and civilization.

I: Oh, you had studied with him?

FOSTER: I did not study about China with him, but I had taken some other courses from him. So I bought this two-volume history of China in a bookstore in San Francisco. I looked in the index to see if there was anything about

the Chinese Communists in it and there was nothing. There was another book in the bookstore called The Chinese Soviets by Victor Yakontor--a Russian. So I bought that, too, and I read these books on the ship going to China. It was a Japanese ship. The Japanese sailors were just fascinated by this book on the Chinese Soviets. I was very naive and was just reading this openly. The sailors would come by and see me reading this book. They would stop and talk to me about it.

I: That's very interesting.

FOSTER: Yes, and then there were some Russian people, I suppose from the business community, who also saw me reading this book. As we got near Shanghai they asked, "Are you going to take that book into Shanghai? Your life won't be worth anything if you take that book ashore with you."

I: Really, and this was 1934?

FOSTER: Yes, 1934. So after listening to them, I finished the book and went down to my room and threw it out the porthole into the harbor in Shanghai.

I: After you got there, were the missionaries talking about the Long March?

FOSTER: No, absolutely not. The Long March started in 1934, right about the time I got there. During my first year in China, they really marched all the way around us up to Shensi. But I knew nothing about it. I didn't hear a thing about it.

I: Do you think most of the missionaries didn't know about it?

FOSTER: That's right. They certainly weren't talking about it.

I: Very few that I have talked with knew about it.

FOSTER: But I just didn't feel free to talk to anybody about this. I had plenty of things to do learning Chinese and starting my first teaching. I had never done any teaching. I taught part-time and studied Chinese part-time. I studied Chinese all morning and my classes were in the afternoon.

I arrived there shortly before the Double Ten, tenth of October, which was a Chinese holiday--a national holiday. Since the Chinese revolution started in Wuchang, we always had an especially big celebration there on the Double Ten. I went down and ate with the students on the Double Ten in their dining room and had my first Chinese meal in China. They taught me how to use chopsticks and it was a very jolly occasion. This was my introduction to the students and student life at the college. Of course, it all seemed very strange. But, I had one or two weeks to get used to things before I was asked to start teaching.

I: Did you live with another missionary?

FOSTER: I lived with Bishop Alfred A. Gilman's family during the first year. That was the accepted practice that the new missionaries lived with the bishop the first year.

I: That was probably a good choice.

FOSTER: He was really quite a distinguished man. He was an astronomer. He built his own telescope and he used to watch the stars.

I: Did he teach astronomy then?

FOSTER: No. Bishop Gilman had been president of the college before they were required to have a Chinese president.

I: So when you went there was always a Chinese president?

FOSTER: Yes, a Chinese president. At one of the first faculty meetings I went to, the point came up as to whether they would conduct the meetings in Chinese or continue to conduct them in English. And I voted with the Chinese.

I: Even though you didn't know Chinese...

FOSTER: Yes, and so they were so happy about this that they elected me the secretary. So then I declined it and said, "I can not do this if I don't understand Chinese. I appreciate your electing me, but you had better elect somebody who can understand Chinese." The missionaries were very angry at me for voting with the Chinese. They wanted the faculty meetings to continue to be conducted in English. They had been conducting Boone College for almost 100 years there and I thought it was high time they had faculty meetings in Chinese. The majority of the faculty were Chinese; the president was Chinese. It was just inconceivable to me that I had done something wrong.

I: They were so unsure of their own Chinese, I suppose, or was it more than that?

FOSTER: It was hard to tell. I think it was just tradition. They were always resisting. The Chinese government wouldn't allow English to be taught in the elementary schools, in the primary schools, or the mission schools. The missionaries didn't like this and they didn't like that. They felt that the Chinese were encroaching. This was, of course, the Chiang Kai-shek government.

I: The Kuomintang government had quite strict regulations, but they weren't always enforced. What about the standards of education in Huachung?

FOSTER: As I understood it, we were registered under the regents of New York State and we felt we had very high standards. Many of the graduates of Boone and Yale-in-China had gone to American universities and received graduate degrees. I thought it was a very respectable college. But there were some things that went on that I thought were very strange.

We had a very distinguished physicist and I used to go by his classroom. He was beginning to use more and more Chinese when he lectured in physics. But a lot of English words he had to use--the scientific terms. So it would be kind of scattered through his lectures. The economics department was entirely American. There were two young teachers, graduates of the Wharton School of Finance. And they used American textbooks, economics textbooks, and I couldn't understand this. It just didn't seem right that in China they would use American illustrations and try to teach American, if there is such a thing as American, economics. It didn't seem to me that it was necessarily good in China. Years later, when the Cultural Revolution came along, this was one of the charges made by the Chinese against the universities: that they were using foreign textbooks and teachers that were trained in foreign countries. There wasn't indigenous material that they were using. I had seen the same thing back in the 1930s.

I: At the University of Nanking, Lewis Smythe, I know, devised his own courses in sociology, during the late 20s or early 30s, but I am sure many people didn't.

FOSTER: One of my students in one of my classes--it was a course in romantic poetry--turned out to be the leader of all the student demonstrations in Wuhan in the year 1937. I was really very excited to think that a student of our little college with 200 students was the leader of all of this business. They had so much influence that when Chiang Kai-shek flew to Hankow to see what was going on, the government closed the ferry for three days to keep the students from Hankow, Wuchang, and Hanyang from getting together. It was discovered that the chief organizer was from our college, so the president was ordered to discover who it was and to punish him. It turned out to be my student in this course in romantic poets. We had been studying Shelley and Byron, among others.

I: So students in Christian universities were equally participating in all these demonstrations?

FOSTER: Apparently, yes.

I: It wasn't more a matter of the government universities?

FOSTER: I heard a very touching story last year up at the Episcopal convention. There was an American teacher from the Episcopal girls' school in Wuchang. She was actually there still teaching after Liberation. They had a big gathering of students to plant trees on Serpent Hill, which was the biggest park in Wuchang. This went right through the center of the city. She was the only American teacher from an American church mission that went out to the tree planting. She was standing there and this student came up and wanted to know why she was interested in this. So she explained how she felt about planting trees and American and Chinese friendship, etc. She went back to China a year or two ago and was in the city of Loyang, farther north from Wuchang. This former student recognized her in a tractor plant and came up and said, "Didn't I see you in Wuchang at that

tree planting?" She said yes. I thought that was just so nice that this American missionary had gone to this and then had been remembered.

I: Yes, I think there are some remaining influences. What about the makeup of the students and faculty--the percentage of Chinese....

FOSTER: We had only one American student. He was the son of one of the missionaries and they didn't have enough money to send him back to school.

I: One of the sons of the missionaries did go to the college?

FOSTER: There was enough teaching in English so that this could be done.

I: He must have known Chinese, then?

FOSTER: Of course, he knew some Chinese. Some of the student body, maybe as high as 50 percent, seemed to me to be the children of Chinese church workers. They tended to be very poor. Some of them were the children of missionary servants. This always interested me because some Chinese criticized the mission movement saying that we appealed only to the educated class, the upper class. Then some said just the opposite, that we were only interested in the outcasts. And then part of the students, maybe as high as 50 percent, seemed to me to be largely the sons of compradores or Chinese who acted as agents for American businessmen. And they were not at all interested in the Christian part of our college. They came to learn English, hoping to have a chance to advance and to see the kind of life that they saw in American movies that were shown in Hankow. So this gave a very curious meld to the student body.

I: Did those students mix?

FOSTER: Well, some, but not too much. One of the churches that supported the college, the Dutch Reformed Church, didn't believe in dances. We couldn't really have college dances. I had never run into this sort of prejudice in the Episcopal Church.

I: The Episcopal Church is very anti-pietistic, is that right?

FOSTER: Right. They are not opposed to drinking, and so forth. They don't like gambling. At least our missionaries thought that the Chinese had a tendency to gamble, so we weren't supposed to encourage this.

I: I hadn't heard about this. What about the physical set-up of the university? Was it pretty simple and plain?

FOSTER: There were a number of buildings and it was really quite a beautiful campus. For instance, in the fall when I arrived, the walks were all lined with potted chrysanthemums. I was very much impressed by this. You don't see that sort of thing in American colleges. The college buildings were not heated, though. I found it rather cold. But from my point of view they were not very elaborate buildings. I guess from the Chinese point of view they were. It was quite a large campus. There was the Boone Middle School, which was on this campus, and also a library school, as well as the college.

I: And the library school was the first in China?

FOSTER: It was the first library school in China, as I understand it. This Mary Elizabeth Wood who started it was dead, but the American Library Association sent an American librarian out. They always saw that there was an American librarian there teaching in the library school.

I: The support for the college came from different countries?

FOSTER: Oh, yes. In our college we had English missionaries. Two of the missions that supported the college were English. Two were American and then Yale-in-China. The English sent some Scottish people out as well as English. And then there was a Swedish man there. I never did understand who paid his salary. But he taught foreign languages.

I: Would he have been from a Lutheran mission?

FOSTER: Yes, but I don't think he was supported officially by a Lutheran church. But somehow they found the money. Also, the National Chinese government paid the salary for one teacher of Chinese language and the Hupeh provincial government paid for one.

I: So there was even Chinese governmental support?

FOSTER: Yes, the Chinese government was interested in improving the caliber of Chinese instruction because they felt that in the mission schools this was lacking. And that was true, it was.

I: How big a school was it?

FOSTER: There were only 200 students.

I: So it was one of the smaller ones.

FOSTER: Yes, it was just microscopic when you think of trying to change China by education. Such a small number of students. It's no wonder we didn't get further than we did.

I: That was a problem with the whole missionary movement.

FOSTER: Yet, there were 14 of these Protestant colleges of which ours was one.

I: And I think their influence was relatively large, but they were small in number. So the Japanese War came while you were there?

FOSTER: It began after I had been there three years. And Hankow very shortly became the capital. So we were bombed just incessantly. I went to Peking on the last train that crossed the Marco Polo Bridge before the fighting broke out. It must have been July 6, 1937. I got into Peking and then the fighting broke out. I was staying in a Chinese hotel. The American Consulate wanted us all to come in there, but that was the last place I wanted to go. We were really trapped there. I had very little money because I was expecting my salary checks to be sent up there during the summer from Shanghai. It really got quite desperate. But I met an overseas Chinese boy from Indonesia. His father was a millionaire. So, he said if he could go out with me and I protected him from the Japanese, he would buy my ticket. So we worked out a cooperative effort.

I: Were the Japanese occupying Peking?

FOSTER: Oh, yes, and the only way we could get out was to go up to Mukden and down to Port Arthur and then down to Dairen. There we got on the boat and I went to Tsingtao, which was around the Japanese lines. Then I went by railroad, zigzagging across China back to Hankow.

I: Did the Chinese student go with you?

FOSTER: No, he went on down to Shanghai and Hong Kong, then back to Indonesia. That was really very exciting. Of course, the trains would be bombed all the time. We would have to flee from the trains and go in the ditches. When I got back to Hankow, there was the first raid. A single scouting plane came over the city. I was just

absolutely paralyzed with fear that it was going to drop a bomb and it was going to hit me. Often, during the first year of the war, I had to lead my classes out into air raid shelters on the campus. I don't know how many times the windows in my house were broken by bombs.

I: Were there casualties?

FOSTER: Not on our campus. One day Madame Chiang came to visit this family of Paul Kwei, the physicist right next door to where I lived. I lived in one-half of the house and they lived in the other half. I always thought the Japanese must have found out about this because they bombed the campus the next time they came. But I don't know if there was any connection.

I: How did the missionaries feel about the Japanese War? I am sure there was quite a strong feeling. Was there also a feeling about U. S. involvement? I know in some places there were associations formed to ask for intervention by the United States.

FOSTER: I don't remember anything like that among the missionaries. There was really strong support for Generalissimo Chiang and his wife among the missionaries. I guess I didn't share that to quite the extent that they did.

I: Wasn't there criticism along with support? Maybe there was not so much then as later.

FOSTER: What I remember from the missionaries is that they were so pessimistic about China. It seemed that so many times during their life they thought China was going to make it and China never had. And there was really no hope for the Chinese. That was the feeling that I got.

I: That's interesting, because many missionaries seemed almost naively optimistic, I think, that God would bring it through somehow. So this is a contradiction to that.

FOSTER: One day Agnes Smedley and Anna Louise Strong came to Hankow and lived with our bishop, Bishop Logan H. Roots. I went over there one day to lunch and there they were at the table. I sat down next to them. This was a whole new side of China that the missionaries had never discussed. I had never learned anything about this from the missionaries at all. I was absolutely entranced.

I: But weren't Smedley and Strong associated with the missionaries like Bishop Roots at that time?

FOSTER: Well, they came to Hankow. I know Agnes Smedley came in a ragged old army uniform and there were no foreign hotels there. There was a Lutheran home where missionaries stayed, but they couldn't get rooms there. I guess the Lutheran home didn't welcome them. So the bishop took them in, you see. Most of the members of our mission refused to go to the bishop's house while they were living there. But I went as often as I could because I was just absolutely entranced by these two women. For instance, when Anna Louise Strong left Hankow, Bishop Roots asked me to take her across the river and put her on the railroad train in Wuchang to go to Canton because she apparently couldn't speak enough Chinese to do this.

I: I'm surprised at that.

FOSTER: I felt very honored to be asked to do this, to accompany such a distinguished American woman and to have a chance to talk to her. And Agnes Smedley--I say she is the most remarkable woman I have ever met in the course of my life. I just couldn't talk to her enough about her

experiences. These women were both very articulate and active. They were quite different. Anna Louise Strong was a very intellectual woman. She had a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, one of the youngest people ever to have gotten a Ph.D. there. And Agnes Smedley really came out of the working class. Her family had been miners in Colorado. She was self-educated. She had been interested in India at the time of World War I and spent some time in prison in New York City, at the instigation of the British imperialists. She was on her way to India when she got to China. The British refused to let her into India, so she went to China instead. She got involved in the Chinese revolutionary movement.

I: Did Agnes Smedley speak Chinese?

FOSTER: Yes, I'm sure she did.

I: But Anna Louise Strong hadn't been there that long?

FOSTER: She had been in and out of China many times. She was married to a Russian for a while and he edited the Moscow News. She always turned up in China at critical times. But she did spend the last few years of her life in Peking. I, of course, didn't see her then. Both these women are buried in Peking.

I: So you came into contact with other Westerners besides missionaries? You were in a good location for that.

FOSTER: Right. During the first year of the war when Hankow was the capital, suddenly our lives just changed. Suddenly, we were right in the center of things. For example, one day I read in the papers that some students from the United States, representing the American Student Movement, were landing at the Wuchang airport. This was during the first year of the war.

One of the girls arriving had been in my class at Swarthmore. I was so excited to read this, that Molly Yard was arriving in Wuchang. I went down and met her plane. Here I met a lot more Chinese students who were welcoming her. It was so exciting to have these people turning up. And there was a man there named Julian Bell, teaching English at Wuhan University, whose aunt was Virginia Woolf. Her sister married Adrian Bell. Julian Bell came out to China on a two-year contract to teach English. We all wanted to meet him, but he rather scorned the missionaries. Then after one year, he broke his contract and went to fight in Spain for the Loyalists. I was very impressed by this, that an Englishman like that would go and fight in Spain. I kind of wondered why he hadn't stayed in China and done something in China to help the Chinese.

I: What was the goal of this American student group?

FOSTER: It was a sympathetic demonstration of support. I don't really remember all the details. But it must have been in sympathy with China's struggle against the Japanese. It was definitely a political thing.

I: Well, that is interesting.

FOSTER: It was interesting. Another one of my classmates at Swarthmore was Barbara Wertheim, who now is Barbara Tuchman. She wrote the biography of General Stilwell--Stilwell and the American Experience in China 1911-'45.

I: Was she around in Central China?

FOSTER: No, I never saw her in China. But later she got interested in China. Then there was another one of my classmates, named Barbara Batt, whose husband had something to do with the Philadelphia Symphony when the Philadelphia Symphony went out to China.

I: When was that?

FOSTER: After Liberation. She and her husband went and she got a chance to go to China, too. So there were a number of us who turned out to have an interest in China.

I: I wonder if maybe you could talk about your trips up to see the Eighth Route Army and your times spent with them?

FOSTER: After Nanking fell, Hankow became the temporary capital of China.

I: What year was this?

FOSTER: This was in 1938. Actually it was either the end of 1937 or the first part of 1938. And a great many people came to Hankow from Nanking. This attracted many visitors from all over the world. One day in Hankow I met Agnes Smedley, an American author, who had been in China for a number of years with the Eighth Route Army, and most recently up north. She came to Hankow bringing the news really of the first Chinese victory, of Lin Piao defeating the Japanese at Ping Hsing Kwan in North China. We were all really heartened to hear the details about this. Agnes Smedley organized--at least I always presumed it was Agnes Smedley--organized a good will mission from Hankow to go to the headquarters of the Eighth Route Army and to bring medical supplies, cloth shoes, and money.

TAPE ONE-SIDE TWO

She wanted a cross-section of people living in Hankow to participate in the mission, but it turned out that only a group of missionaries went. The business people that had promised to go were all intimidated by their superiors and

so they didn't go with us. It turned out that there was Frances Roots, the daugher of the bishop (she was about my age), an old deaconess, and a young deacon, all from the Episcopal Church. Then one Polish woman, named Rolf Suess, who had come to China to be Madame Chiang Kai-shek's English secretary in the New Life Movement, came. She was a journalist. A very sophisticated, worldly-wise woman. But she got so discouraged by what she saw in Nanking that she turned over and joined the other side. She was a very interesting woman. She has written a book called Shark Fins and Millet, about China. I think that book describes our visit. So there was one non-missionary and she fit in very well, actually, with our group.

I: Wasn't Agnes Smedley with you?

FOSTER: No, Agnes Smedley didn't go; she just organized the group. A lot of Chinese women had made cloth shoes and we took a great many bags of shoes. And we took splints for their hospitals. I remember we had a check signed by H. H. Kung, the finance minister, who wanted to show his appreciation to the guerillas during this time of the United Front.

We went north by railroad to Chengchow, then to Loyang and then the pass in on the Yellow River. I can't remember. Is it Tung Kwan Pass? And there we crossed the Yellow River and went by train to Linfeh, which was the headquarters of the Central Government Army. We met this General Wei Li-Hwang, a Kuomintang general who had been a warlord. He was just amazed that we were traveling with good credentials to the Eighth Route Army headquarters. That was an education for him. And then, I suppose, we had some army guards with us from Hankow. I don't quite remember that.

After we got through Wei Li-hwang's headquarters, we were in the hands of the Eighth Route Army and we went, I suppose, on horseback or muleback. I don't remember just what. Then we went to the headquarters in the village and there we just stayed. We were billeted in Chinese homes and we ate Chinese food. I remember they wouldn't let us eat millet because they said American stomachs couldn't digest millet. I felt very insulted because I wanted to try it, at least. They made us eat rice and all these fancy foods.

I think the village was in Shansi, southeast Shansi. I can't remember the name of the village. We always lived in this out-of-the-way-village right with the people. We went to mass meetings and we all had to give speeches. We had to sing and we presented our gifts and so on. We went to many meetings in which we were briefed about what the army was doing, the purposes of the war, and international cooperation. We met Chu Teh, the commander-in-chief, and his wife, Kang Keh-ching, and all sorts of high military officers. We were treated like kings and queens.

I really had never been in the Chinese countryside before, so it was an eye-opener to me. The towns all had city walls. It was quite different from Central China. It looked medieval. It was really old China. This was where China originated--up north.

I: Did you get to Yenan?

FOSTER: No, we were invited to go to Yenan, but I had to get back and teach. This was during the Christmas vacation. So the young deacon, Charles Higgins, and Rolf Suess went to Yenan and saw Chairman Mao and I could have gone. I missed my opportunity and I never did meet Chairman Mao. That would have been my chance.

But I went back to my teaching. I remember I was asked to give a talk to the students about the Eighth Route Army. The governor's secretary came and sat right in the front row and took notes all the time that I was talking. I remember one of the girls saying that she had always thought that Chu-Mao was one person. She was so surprised to hear they were two people. They were just so extremely innocent and ignorant of what was going on in their own country--these students in a Christian college. And yet, they were interested. Really, it helped my relations with the students. The fact that I had gone to visit the Eighth Route Army made me kind of a hero. This old professor of Chinese, whose salary was paid by the central government, had never talked to me before. He came up to me one day and said in Chinese, "Mr. Foster, I want to tell you that I appreciate very much that you did that, that you went up to the headquarters of our people's army." I really felt the United Front meant something when he made that leap.

I: I think it would be very interesting if you could go into detail about those mass meetings and what you said and what other people said. You said you had to speak.

FOSTER: Well, the same thing happened to me when I went back two years ago. I was constantly asked to speak, and especially to sing. And I brought a song book. Songs of workers and protest.

I: American songs?

FOSTER: Yes. We gave it to our guide in Shanghai, so he would know about some American protests. We really had a great many songs to sing to them. But I felt so ignorant of my own country's history when I was in China.

When I was out there before, the Chinese would tell me: "We admire America because you pioneered the 40-hour week." But I didn't realize that. Here I was a graduate of an American university, but I knew nothing about our own labor history. And the Chinese, particularly these left-wing Chinese, knew a lot more about this than I knew. I learned about my own country from them. I was really ashamed that I was so ignorant. When I was with the U.S.I.S. (the U. S. Information Service), we were supposed to be making friends for America. Yet the very thing we could have talked about the most, that which had done the most good for America, we were the most ignorant of. We were ignorant of our labor history and the things our working people have accomplished which the working people in other countries greatly admire us for.

But I can't remember what songs we sang. They like folk songs. Even things like Old Black Joe, I suppose, they would have liked. But Fran Roots was a musician, so she knew some of these songs. She was invited back by Chou En-lai with her husband and two grand pianos to tour China after Liberation and play western music for the Chinese. This was supposed to have been the first western music performed in the People's Republic of China after Liberation.

Chou En-lai was really grateful to Bishop Roots for his interest in their cause. I remember when I met Peng Teh-hwai at Bishop Root's house and the bishop said grace. Peng didn't realize what was going on. He wouldn't eat until he had apologized to Bishop Roots for a missionary he had kidnapped one time in the past. It turned out it was a China Inland missionary and not an Episcopalian missionary.

I: He had thought it was an Episcopalian?

FOSTER: Peng didn't know the difference. But Bishop Roots accepted the apology and took Peng out on the porch and showed him all these splints that we took up. He said, "Maybe you did capture some missionaries in the past, but as a Christian my answer to this is, 'Now you're in trouble and I'm giving you splints'." This is the way Christians should answer deeds like that. I thought it was statesman-like. I really admired Bishop Roots for that.

I: He must have been unusual.

FOSTER: He really was. He was very much interested in the ecumenical movement. He even left the Episcopal Church at one time to work with the National Christian Council because he was interested in national problems. Chiang Kai-shek used to send his private airplane to bring Bishop Roots up to pray with him when he couldn't sleep at night.

I: So he was a friend of Chiang's, too?

FOSTER: I should say he was. He was also open to the Communists at that time. At that time, in that critical period of Chinese history when a lot of people thought if China was really going to defeat the Japanese, they had to unite and stop the war.

I: Do you think he wasn't so open to Communism later? He was also giving hospitality to Smedley and Strong.

FOSTER: I think as long as he was in China he was. Later on I think he changed. I heard in his old age, during the McCarthy era, that he wasn't quite as outspoken.

I: It was a harder time then.

FOSTER: That's what I figured. I didn't know him in those days. I thought when he came back to the United States that he didn't feel as free to speak as he had in China.

Then, at the end of the first year of the war in the summer of 1938, when the Japanese were moving up the Yangtze River toward Hankow and coming down the railroad from the north from Peking, it was very evident that Hankow was going to fall within a matter of days. Our college, of course, moved out and went down to Southwest China. As many people as could, left. But it was decided by our mission that the missionaries were going to stay and run refugee camps for Chinese, older Chinese and sick Chinese that couldn't leave, as well as poor Chinese. So they wanted me to stay and work in the refugee camp. This was, of course, before Pearl Harbor when the United States was not yet at war with Japan. I wasn't really very happy about staying behind.

Then I was asked by Col. Carlson of the United States Marines to take medicine from the International Red Cross, a whole warehouse full of medicine--it finally filled two boxcars--out to Hankow to the north to establish a hospital in Eighth Route Army territory for Communist soldiers, guerillas. I asked for a little time to think this over. He said it would be possible for the Japanese to cut the railroad to Hankow within three days. If I was going to get out, I would have to move very quickly.

I went and asked the bishop if I could go, not Bishop Roots, but his assistant, Bishop Gilman. He said he would fire me if I went. So I went around to talk this over with some of the Episcopalian missionaries that I was more friendly with. They said they would give me part of their salaries, so I would have enough money to live on and that they really would like me to go. So, of course, I accepted, and I left within the day with two Chinese boxcars and was going to be met somewhere farther north at the Yellow River.

I wandered around for a few weeks. I was supposed to work with a Canadian doctor, Dr. Brown, and it took a while for him to catch up with me. I had to wait at the Eighth Route Army headquarters for quite a while before he came.

Then we were able to use a Church of the Brethren Hospital. They had a nurse, an American nurse, and they were very anxious to open the hospital to start serving the people. In fact, this nurse was convinced that I had answered a prayer when I arrived with a doctor and all the medicine.

So we worked there for about three months, also in southeast Shansi, in the town of Liaohsien. That name has been changed now, but I think I have found out what the new name is--Tso Ch'nan (Zuoquan).

The missionaries cooperated with us very well. We filled the hospital up with soldiers. I was the business manager of the hospital and we received a certain amount of money per soldier per day for running the hospital, from the Chinese Red Cross. I submitted the accounts. I did all sorts of work in the hospital. I worked as an orderly and sometimes in the operating room. I had had no previous medical experience, but in a crisis you find you can do all sorts of things that you didn't know before.

I: You helped in the operating room?

FOSTER: Yes. I remember we had a lot of soldiers with frostbitten toes and we had to amputate those toes. I had to hold the jar as the toes fell off. At first, I had to leave the operating room. I just couldn't stand it. But I got hardened to it.

After about three months, word arrived from the Eighth Route Army that the Japanese were attacking the base and we would have to move right away that night. So,

in the dead of winter we packed our stuff and left on donkey back, just within a few hours, and traveled down to the Yellow River. I went to Sian by bus and down to Chengtu, Chungking, Kweiyang and Kunming, trying to rejoin my college at Tali in western Yunnan Province. I did part of the Burma Road on bicycle. I bought a bicycle and pedalled out there; six days of bicycling--all by myself.

I: Was this afterwards that you were on the Burma Road?

FOSTER: Yes.

I: But at first you stayed at Tali?

FOSTER: Well, Tali was half-way out the Burma Road--toward the Burma border. And I could get to Kunming by bus, but the Burma Road had really just opened. So, I took the Burma Road to the university. Then when I came back to the United States a year later, I went down the rest of the Burma Road to Lashio and Rangoon. But I went on a truck. A merchant had come up from Lashio to do business and so I went back with him.

I: So you stayed there in Tali for a year?

FOSTER: For a year--two semesters. To finish up my five-year contract. I had gone originally out for five years. But I had a half-year off to work in this hospital with the Eighth Route Army.

I: The mission just took that off the five years?

FOSTER: That's what I did. And they paid me all my back salary.

I: Even for the time you were with the Eighth Route Army?

FOSTER: Yes. So I felt that was an accomplishment. Then after that year with the college, I went home on furlough in 1940. But when I came back, I did not want to continue

teaching in the college which was deep in the rear. Eventually, it got on the front again when the Japanese attacked Burma, but that was after I left. I decided that what I wanted to do was to work with INDUSCO--the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives--because I felt this was an important contribution to the war effort to help build up Chinese production. A lot of the money for INDUSCO came from the United States, so I thought it was important to report back some of the things we were doing. So, technically, I was English secretary for the Yunnan-Kweichow region. I was attached to the staff of Bishop Hall in Hong Kong. It was the first time in the history of the American Church Mission that a missionary had been allowed to work outside the church in a secular institution. So I was essentially doing social service work.

I: What do you mean by "English secretary"?

FOSTER: I was the English language secretary, which meant that I could do publicity work. I studied accounting the year when I was in Cincinnati--the year of furlough--with the idea that I could help with the financial part. Actually, I didn't ever get into that. It got to be very discouraging because the INDUSCO workers were disappearing. When you traced them, you would find they were put in concentration camps.

I: Oh, really?

FOSTER: Yes, and there was a lot of oppression. I had it written and my contract with the church that I could spend three months out of every year outside that diocese. I wanted freedom to travel around China. If ever anything came up like going to the Eighth Route Army again, I would be able to do it.

So, after nine months, I went up to Chungking, after which I came down with jaundice and was quite sick. Then I had a chance to work with the Office of War Information. Actually, I went to the military attache at the American Embassy in Chungking to see how I could join the United States Army. He said it was impossible to join the United States Army outside the United States, and I had no way of getting back to the United States. He said anyway it would be better to work for a civilian agency because the Army would probably just put me to work at a typewriter and I would never leave the United States. If one goes to work in an American agency in China, one would be able to use his Chinese experience and do a lot more good. This was Col. Barrett of the military attache's office, who gave me that advice. I liked him very much.

I: The idea was to help with the war effort?

FOSTER: Yes, after Pearl Harbor, I just felt it was important to help the Chinese military. The U. S. Office of War Information was a good place for me to work because they were doing information and cultural work, which was exactly the sort of thing I had been doing.

I: What do you mean by cultural work?

FOSTER: Oh, we brought American professors to China and some Chinese scholars to the United States. There was an exchange. That was the main thing. Wilma Fairbank, Dr. John K. Fairbank's wife, was the cultural attache of the embassy. When she came to town, we would go and visit Chinese painters. She was interested in Chinese museums. It was such a much broader life than what I had had as a missionary. To be outside the Christian community was just a great boon and most of our employees were Chinese newspaper men. This was a kind of Chinese I had never known. They really were very interesting. I enjoyed it.

The years in Chungking were really fascinating because we got to know our opposite numbers in other ministries of information--a wide variety of Chinese friends. I served on the China Defense League. I was the treasurer of the China Defense League of which Madame Sun Yat-sen was the chairman. She was subsidizing orphanages, hospitals and medical work in China. Her house was right next to the United States Information Service office. So it was very easy to go over there.

The China Defense League received money from the United States, particularly from trade unions, and this money was sent to the Bank of China. My job was to go to the bank, cash the checks and draw the money out. I would get the money out of the bank and go around the corner and there would be an Eighth Route Army car with armed guards inside. They would drive me with these sacks of money to Madame Sun Yat-sen's home. Then we would sit around drinking tea and counting the money in her house.

When the money was all counted, I would go through the gate to the United States Information Service office which was right next door. The F.B.I. knew because I was interviewed about this when I got back. They wanted to know what I was doing. I said I figured if this money was raised by sympathetic Americans and if the government allowed it to get out of America, then it was perfectly all right for me to see that it got to the people it was raised for. They never quarrelled with that.

I: You gave money to Madame Sun Yat-sen and who else?

FOSTER: She dispersed the money all over China. It was charged that it was supporting the Eighth Route Army liaison office in Chungking. If that was true, it just simply meant

that they didn't have to transfer that money from a border region but could spend the money on relief work in that border region and maybe technically the money was going to support the liaison office in Chungking. But that was just the bookkeeping thing as far as I was concerned.

Then, after I lived in Chungking for about two years, the USIS opened a branch office in Chengtu because we were building five B-29 bases there in order to bomb Manchuria. Actually, they never did bomb Manchuria. By that time, we had captured some islands in the Pacific and we bombed the Japanese Mainland from those islands. But anyway, there were a million Chinese peasants who were mobilized to haul in dirt to build these air bases and they wanted a USIS office up there to work with the workmen.

Our job was to take American newsreels around to villages from which these workers came. We showed newsreels about the American war effort to show the Chinese that we were working hard and fighting hard against the enemy. I got gas and transportation from the U. S. Air Force.

We would show these movies to thousands of people in Chinese villages. The night watchman would go around ringing a gong for the people to come. We would put up a screen in the market square and there would be as many people on the back side of the screen as there was on the front side of the screen--seeing the movie backwards--but they could see it just as well because it was a transparent screen. So we just went around.

We had exhibits of photographs; we sent news out to the Chinese press and gave them articles which they would translate into Chinese. We would have concerts of American music.

We had a library of American books for people who could read English. We just did the whole sort of mass media work there in Chengtu. I enjoyed the year that I was in charge of the USIS office there. Then I came home for my second trip--about 1944--just before the Japanese surrendered. I really came home to get married, but I didn't tell the government about that.

I: So then you went back again?

FOSTER: I went back again after the Japanese surrendered. In the interim I worked in San Francisco in the USIS and was in charge of broadcasting to China from the United States for a few months. Then after the Japanese surrendered, the USIS closed the San Francisco office down and asked me if I would like to go back to China. So I did. I opened the USIS office in Hankow after the war. It was fun for me to go back there. In fact, I found a lot of my library still in my office in that hostel at the college.

I: Was the college running again?

FOSTER: I'm not sure. I don't think it came back while I was still there. I got back very soon after this--in October.

I: What did you do then from 1945?

FOSTER: After I had been in Hankow for about six months, I was asked to go up and run the office in Peking of the USIS. That was when General Marshall came out to China to negotiate between the Communists and the Kuomintang. He was in Nanking, but the executive headquarters for the negotiating was in Peking in PUMC, the Peking Union Medical College. So they let me live in a house they said had been the home of a Chinese minister, a minister to China back in the 19th century. There was a Ming temple right next to the city wall, in the legation quarter, not far from the U.S. Consulate.

Then my wife came out with our oldest son. I saw him for the first time when he was nine months old. I flew down to Tsingtao, and met this Navy vessel on which they came. Then we went from Tsingtao by ship to Taku, the port of Tientsin, and we got off there. We had to go by weapons carrier, U.S. Marine guards, to Tientsin.

They put me in the front seat, handed me a rifle and asked, "Could you shoot?" I figured this would be very compromising since I was working for the U.S. State Department and here we were officially negotiating between the Communists and Kuomintang. The idea was that the Communists might be going to fire at us and they were going to want me to shoot. I said I didn't know how to shoot a gun, which was really true. So then they put me in the back seat and an armed Marine got in the front seat and off we set through no-man's-land to go to Tientsin, which was in 1946. We spent the night in Tientsin in a hotel and then took the train to Peking the next day. Then my wife started keeping house in China.

I: This was 1946?

FOSTER: After a year of that they decided to transfer me to Shanghai, about June of 1947. Then Congress reduced the budget of the USIS by 50 percent and half of the American employees had to go home. I was in that 50 percent. I was really very unwilling to go home and was exploring other possibilities. But by that time my wife was pregnant and we would lose our commissary privileges. We were buying our canned milk from a Navy commissary and, of course, if I had stayed in China and not worked for the American government, I would not have access to this.

My Chinese friends were scratching their heads and trying to think of places where I might work. I thought of going back to work for the Episcopal Church, but it didn't seem to me that the Episcopal Church had much of a future in China at that point. That really seemed like a dead end, so I didn't even approach them. What the Chinese suggested was teaching at Futan University in Shanghai. But I finally decided as long as the American government wanted to pay my way home I had better take advantage of that. We had some complications about RH factor and I thought we should probably be near a good hospital, we we came back.

I: Were you somewhat disenchanted with the USIS, or was this due only to the reduction?

FOSTER: Oh, I certainly was disenchanted with all sorts of things. Oh, some very mysterious things happened. Like on Easter Sunday in Peking, we went to church at the Anglican chapel in the British Embassy. We had just sat down in our pews when one of our servants came in and tapped me on the elbow and said my office had been burglarized. I never did get to the bottom of that.

The gateman, who was Chinese, obviously knew something about it, but he was afraid to tell me about it. It was suggested that I not talk about it by the Americans in the consulate. But, at the time I left the church service, I was very careful to tell an Englishman there all about it, what had happened to my office, that it had been broken into, and so on, because I always feel the more people who know about something, the better.

I: What did they do exactly?

FOSTER: There was a copy of Thunder Out of China on my desk, which was not my book. It belonged to an American working in the office. This was on my desk, opened, and things arranged on the desk. My desk had obviously been rifled and it looked as though it had all been set up for a photograph. I really expected some trouble to develop out of this incident and to be charged with reading subversive literature and things like this. But nothing ever happened directly, except within a few months I was recalled.

When I got to Washington, I was given a month there before being terminated. I was given a month to look for a job. It became obvious to me that I was not going to get another job with the American government. Every place I went I got just a cold shoulder. I remember a black secretary--this was really one of my first experiences with a black--going into an office and a black girl asking me, talking to me and finding out that I was just back from China. And she just burst into tears. And she said, "Oh, I just can't stand the way they're treating all of you. Bringing you back like this and firing you."

I: So there were a lot of you?

FOSTER: 50 percent of us came back from around the world.

I: It wasn't just a budget cut?

FOSTER: It was a budget cut.

I: But were they bringing back the people they least wanted there?

FOSTER: Who knows? But I had another experience. I dashed out one noon during a lunch break to go to a Chinese tailor to get some clothes measured. I didn't have much time so I

drove rather fast. When I got back, this American came up to me and scolded me and said I had been going so fast he couldn't follow me, so could I please tell him where I went. So I was obviously being trailed, you see, and it was just so funny that he would talk that way.

I think that one of the explanations for this was that the American bases were being closed. All these barracks were being closed and there were a lot of American magazines that had been brought out for the GIs to read. They were going to burn all these magazines, so we made a big attempt to get those magazines released to us. We had planes going out to all the Communist border regions--American Army planes--taking out American Army officers and bringing some Chinese back. It was kind of a ferry service. And so we wanted to send these magazines out to these areas that had been entirely cut off from American publications. It seemed like a very harmless thing to do. It was part of our job to spread information about the United States. And what is subversive about Time magazine and Newsweek magazine? But the Army had this bureaucratic red tape notion that everything had to be burned, that you couldn't take them back to the United States.

But finally, Dr. John K. Fairbank was able to break through this. So I was taking these mailsacks full of American magazines out to the airport to be distributed to these various Communist bases. So I suppose there were some branches, of the American government in Peking, that thought this was very suspicious. Actually, it was really all open and above-board and authorized by the American Embassy in Nanking. But this was one of the contradictions that existed. One arm of the American government wouldn't know what the other was doing.

I: In the meantime, what was happening at Huachung University?

FOSTER: I never really heard anything. I suppose they did open back in Wuchang after the war, but not during the six months that I was there. I did go over to Wuchang and talked to some of the servants who were still living there, but none of the missionaries were back, yet, during the time I was there. I was able to salvage some of my personal things.

I had one very amusing experience I'd like to relate. I was invited to go and talk to the Buddhist association in Hankow in the Chinese city when I was working for the American government. I was really very flattered to be invited to do this because I never had any experience like this. Apparently there was a big Buddhist monastery in Wuchang, but we had never had a training session on Buddhism. At least, I had never had any contact with the Buddhists.

They wanted me to give a speech, so I gave a speech. Our cathedral in Hankow had been bombed and so I made some reference to this--the terrible Japanese atrocities. Afterwards one of these Buddhists came up and said, "Mr. Foster, we didn't like to correct you there, but we think you ought to know that the cathedral was bombed by American planes and not by Japanese." I was just really horrified, but I was glad they told me.

I: It was American?

FOSTER: Hankow was occupied by the Japanese. Maybe the Americans didn't know what they were bombing.

I: So then you came back to the United States in 1947. Did you come here to Mankato?

FOSTER: No. I still had only my bachelor's degree and so I applied at a number of universities. I wanted to go to school right away that fall. Some of the universities I applied to said if I waited a year they would consider it. But I couldn't wait a year. My wife's home was in Chicago and I had been in Chicago. The University of Illinois was hiring an assistant in English to teach. I had never worked in the United States. All my work experience had been in China, but they would hire me right away that fall. And I could earn enough to support my family, get some work experience and do graduate work at the same time. So it was ideal.

At one point my winter coat hadn't come from China nor had any of our stuff. I got a telephone call just out of the blue saying there was a boxcar for me in Chicago. All I could think of was my winter coat. My father-in-law went down and got all this stuff, in the boxcar, taken out to Oak Park. There was all this Chinese furniture that we had shipped from Peking to Shanghai. It was all shipped home to the United States, came through customs and was put on the freight train to Chicago. I didn't have to pay anything for any of this. I never thought I would see it again.

I: Who shipped it?

FOSTER: The State Department. They packed it all to send down to Shanghai and before it got to Shanghai I had been terminated and sent home. They didn't know what to do with it, so they just sent it on. We had all these cases of canned milk that was going to feed our baby for a year. At some point the ship must have gone through the tropics and all this milk had exploded, or a good bit of it. It could have done some Chinese some good or some other American in China. But they hadn't gone through any of it.

We had big cans of pepper that we were going to use in China. We were using this for 10 years. All the time I was a graduate student, and even for five years after we moved up to Mankato, we still had some of these supplies that had been shipped. I spent five years at the University of Illinois and then got a job in Mankato and moved to Mankato.

I: You got a doctorate in Illinois?

FOSTER: Yes, first a master's and then a doctorate.

I: And then you came to Mankato in 1951?

FOSTER: 1952. And we are now in our 25th year here.

I: Why don't we go to your recent trip to China?

FOSTER: As soon as it became evident that there was going to be a thaw in Chinese-American relations, I tried to contact the Chinese to get back to China. This was before the ping-pong team went and before Nixon went, before there were Chinese embassies or offices on the American continent. It was really very hard to make any contacts. I wrote countless letters and I tried every avenue that I could. I got no response except from one bookstore in Peking. I guess I got the name of the bookstore from our librarian who is Chinese and who sometimes bought Chinese books.

I had not taken a sabbatical all these years because I thought I would save it until I could go to China. I actually, at one point, got a sabbatical to go to China. Then I got this one answer from this bookstore in Peking saying I should not refer to their country as Mainland China; this was an imperialistic, chauvinistic term. The name of their country was the People's Republic of China.

I: They were giving you a clue as to how to get a response?

FOSTER: I guess so, yes. Oh, they said they didn't handle visas, naturally. That was very easy to accept. Finally, I realized that in order to go to China I would have to change my request. I was asking for about six months. It finally became evident to me that you could only go on a three-week trip and that you had to have an American sponsoring organization. So I looked through all the names of the organizations I belonged to and none of them seemed likely to organize a trip to go to China, so I looked around for new organizations to join. One was the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars.

I: Did you go with them?

FOSTER: No. They had some two or three trips that I heard about and I applied to go through them, but then they were not allowed to send any more tours for one reason or another.

I: What was that?

FOSTER: I really don't know, except they also wanted to do research and they wanted to go for a longer period of time. The Chinese, I guess, were not prepared to do this. Now, whether there were any political reasons, I don't know. They had wanted to bring a group of Chinese to the United States with the American Friends Service Committee. They had money for this. This was never granted by the Chinese. When I went out there, I found out that the Chinese were not interested in cultural exchange as long as Taiwan was a question. I guess that was understandable. I don't know whether or not they put down some stipulations that the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars didn't want to follow. But then there was the Guardian, a newspaper in New York City which organized trips for their sustainers. So I became a sustainer which meant I paid them $5 a month in support.

They had a trip of teachers going and I applied for this and was accepted. The college had given up sabbaticals by that time, but I was able to get half of my expenses provided by various research funds at the college. So all I had to do was raise $1000. It roughly cost at that point about $2000. And everything went very well.

The first thing that happened was when the State Department announced that if you sent in your passport they would remove the stipulation that made it invalid for travel to the People's Republic of China. I guess that was right after Nixon was elected the first time. So I sent my passport in. All that lady did, you know, was take a ruler and fountain pen and cross it through China. I could have done that myself. Maybe I wouldn't have used the right kind of ink or something. But there were numerous clues that things were going to happen. For instance, up in Dayton's I found a copy of Nagel's Guide to China, a very fat guide book, that was published, reprinted in this country by the Cowell's Publishing Company. This was early, like in 1970, that I found that on sale in Dayton's. And I thought, aha, something's breaking, or that wouldn't have appeared right then.

I: I think it would be interesting if you would talk about what you saw in educational areas during your trip since that was what you were in before.

FOSTER: I had never been to Canton and I was happy to go to Canton. I had lived in Peking for a year. I would have liked to have gone to Wuhan but our trip was not scheduled to go there. I kept hoping that some airfield would be clouded over and we would find ourselves in Wuhan. But that didn't happen.

We visited, of course, in the summertime, when the schools were mostly closed. Even so, the Chinese would call in some of the students of the neighborhood elementary schools to put on a theatrical performance for us or sing some songs, give an athletic exhibition, or something like that. So we got some sense of what the schools did. But one of the important things about education in China is that they used the summer period for the students to get work experience. We did see students out working in places where we went. And, in a sense, the whole of Chinese society is just one big school where everybody is learning all the time. We did see the physical schools and we saw school equipment. We certainly talked to teachers because toward the end of our trip in August, teachers were coming back and having meetings and getting prepared.

Actually we saw some schools that were in session. In the universities that we went to there were some students. (Well, at Tsinghua University there were students in the library studying Confucius to go out and teach the people Confucius and Lin Piao). So we did see what the students were doing. We were able to talk to teachers, which were actually revolutionary committees. What interested me was that sometimes there were students on these revolutionary committees and sometimes there were maintenance people on revolutionary committees. So they were really a cross-section of the institution. They were able to tell us about such things as admission requirements and examinations and teacher-student relations, all the sort of things that we, as teachers, were interested in. There were also a couple of health workers in our group. We went to a medical school and we saw clinics.

I was particularly happy that we went to a PLA Army camp, to a People's Liberation Army headquarters outside Nanking. We really got a very warm reception there. I was, in fact, pressing for such a visit. I was asked to talk to the troops of one company that had put on an artillery demonstration for us. They asked us if we would like to fire their rifles. Again, I said I couldn't shoot a rifle. I was director of Peace Studies at Mankato State University. So, even if I could have fired a rifle, I guess I would have thought that it wasn't fitting that I do that.

At the time that I was treasurer of the China Defense League in Chungking there was a Chinese woman named Cynthia Liao, the daughter of Liao Chung-kai, who was the secretary of the China Defense League. I knew that Liao Chung-kai was quite a famous revolutionary figure in Canton, so I asked one of our guides in Canton if he knew if Liao Chung-kai had any children or grandchildren. I didn't remember Cynthia Liao's Chinese name. So I got her Chinese name, found out she was living in Peking and I had the guide write it in my little notebook. When we got to Peking, I asked our woman guide if I could see this Chinese woman and she appeared one day at our hotel. I had lunch with her. Nobody else was at the table. We had a very nice lunch and conversation about Chungking.

I found out her husband had been Chou En-lai's secretary in Chungking. I didn't know that at the time that I was there. He was assassinated in Chungking by the Kuomintang. But she told me about her daughter who was working for the Hsinhua news agency in Peking. In fact, she was living with this daughter and her husband and her grandchild in Peking. She was a lady now of about 70 years old. I

asked her if she was retired and she said, "People like me never retire." She didn't tell me what she did at the present time. Her mother, Liao Chung-kai's widow, was the minister of overseas Chinese during this present government and she died within the last few years. So it was interesting to talk to somebody that I had known before. I tried to meet somebody else that I had known but wasn't allowed to see him. At least he never appeared. Maybe he didn't want to see me.

Apparently they located him because they said there was a conversation about me. They must have told him about this contact that I had had with the Eighth Route Army back in the days when I knew him. And he said, "I never knew that about Mr. Foster. He never told me about that," or something like that. I don't know just what. He was a well-known biologist and working in Peking at the Academy of Science or something.

I: It's too bad it didn't come through. It would have been interesting.

FOSTER: He had not been a member of the Episcopal Church, but was a friend of some of the missionaries. That is how I had known him. He also came from a big landlord family, I guess. He had been very rich. But somehow he has kept his peace with the present government and was now a very distinguished scientist.

I: Are there any Chinese, for instance, that you might give biographical material on? I was thinking maybe of one of those professors at Huachung in the 1930s. There has been some argument on how well-qualified they were and what the students were like in the Christian universities.

FOSTER: The English department wasn't too different from the English department at Swarthmore or Gustavus. I thought we had a very good English department and I thought we had quite high standards. The head of the English department was an English lady whose salary was paid by the London Mission. I guess she would be more like a high school English teacher in this country. She was also the registrar of the college, and I found it kind of funny to be working under a woman. In those days it was kind of uncommon. But she had very high standards. And there were a Scottish lady in the department and an American lady. These were all missionaries' wives. Outside of this lady who was the head of the department, I was the only professional member of the English department. We had two years of writing courses, composition courses. Our students had to do most of their studying from English books in all of their courses. They were quite proficient in English. They knew a lot more English than, say, an American majoring in a foreign language is likely to know of that foreign language.

I: You say most of their courses were in English?

FOSTER: Yes. And most of their textbooks were in English.

I: That must have been awfully difficult, I should think.

FOSTER: I should think so too.

I: Especially if you were someone not gifted in languages but maybe in science, etc.

FOSTER: They really had to be bi-lingual and they really were bi-lingual.

I: Did they ever protest having so much of their work in English?

FOSTER: Perhaps; but they never really protested anything against us. I was telling you about that one student who was a leader of the student movement in Wuhan and was quite different from most of our students. He was really very nationalistic and quite anti-foreign, but most of our students were not anti-foreign. Finally, when I left China in 1947, I noticed in the USIS that a lot of Chinese employees were giving us the cold shoulder and turning against us. That was one of the factors in my coming back. I found this hard to take. By that time it was quite apparent that a civil war was going to break out. General Marshall had left and negotiations had fallen through. It was also apparent that the United States was doing something behind the scenes. The United States was doing more to help Chiang Kai-shek than they had admitted.

I: Were these servants, then, opposed to the Kuomintang?

FOSTER: I don't mean servants.

I: You mean in the USIS?

FOSTER: No, I was thinking about these Chinese newspapermen who were highly qualified. I should tell you about an example there.

For instance, in Hankow, I took all of these Chinese down from Chungking with me to open up the Hankow office, and the sign went up in the United States Consulate. I can't remember just exactly how it was worded, but the intent of it was that no Chinese employee was to use the white toilet. These Chinese came to me and they said, "We don't mind using a Chinese toilet. In fact, we prefer Chinese toilets, but if we're going to work here that sign has to come down." The sign was just like saying: "For Whites Only!" You see, the consulate officials were not

used to educated Chinese working for them in the consulate. They were used to these flunkies and servants. But my Chinese employees were not subservient. They said the sign had to come down.

I: Would you say there was more of this kind of thing among the consulate and business people rather than among the missionaries?

FOSTER: I was amused that the Episcopalian missionaries looked down on the State Department officials. They thought the officials were socially inferior. They kept talking about the old days when the consulate officials didn't have salaries. The only money they got was by selling visas, the only they could take in. This was back in the 19th century. These officials were regarded as riffraff. The Episcopalians didn't have much use for such people.

I: I knew there was always kind of a division, but most of the missionaries I knew simply felt that the consulate people lived high, drank and were immoral.

FOSTER: In regard to such class-consciousness, I told you that in our mission they didn't like Southerners coming out because they supposedly were prejudiced. For example, the girl whom I had known in college, who had an aunt in Peking, was from the South. They really didn't want her to come out because she was from the South. They raised questions about her. She was from Baltimore. I didn't think she had any race prejudice, but I didn't have any way of knowing. There weren't any black students at Swarthmore at that time. We tried to get one in 1929 when I went there. But we were hauled into the president's office and told we should stop that agitating or we would all lose our scholarships.

I: Do you have anything more to say about business, diplomatic and missionary relations? How the three groups related to each other?

FOSTER: I had some contact with the Oxford Movement group. They made a great effort to recruit business people.

I: Oh, they did?

FOSTER: Yes, the only business people I ever met were through the Oxford group. I found them to be quite interesting people. But there really wasn't much contact. There was one Episcopal minister who ran the English church in Hankow which was for foreign children.

I: Did the missionaries ever criticize the way other Westerners treated Chinese?

FOSTER: I don't know if they did or not. Episcopalians were mostly in the big cities and they were mostly with pretty well-educated Chinese.

I: Everybody seemed to be on a fairly equal basis?

FOSTER: One thing came about this. I told you about these Thanksgiving parties that we had. One of our Chinese professors married an American girl. This created a great furor because, after all, she had grown up in an Episcopalian family, and if they didn't invite her this would mean they would be excluding an American. And yet, if they invited her husband this would be breaking down the bars against the Chinese.

I: They did have bars?

FOSTER: They didn't know how to resolve this. The Chinese had never been invited to the American Thanksgiving dinner. This was the time when the Americans got together--American Episcopalians only--and this created a terrible problem. I really can't remember now how this was resolved.

I: That seems incredible now.

FOSTER: It really does. So there were some bars among the Westerners against the Chinese.

I: How did they justify that? Were they more relaxed with their own kind?

FOSTER: There was no justification that struck me as rational. I was just outraged about it.

I: What about inter-marriage? Was that frowned upon?

FOSTER: Dr. James Lester Hawks Pott, who I guess was the first president of St. John's University, had a Chinese wife and that was back in the 19th century. They had five or six children. This was considered O.K. But this prejudice grew up later.

I: So later they did discourage missionaries from marrying Chinese?

FOSTER: Oh, yes, I am sure.

I: Was it ever overt, or sort of understood?

FOSTER: I just know that I never met a marriageable Chinese girl when I was out there. There were only my students. And it was absolutely unthinkable for a professor to have dated a student, even though I was younger than a lot of my students. It never occurred to me to do that. There were YWCA secretaries. I met YWCA secretaries. But, again, it never occurred to me to date a YWCA secretary. This would have been unheard of, too. This just didn't happen.

I: Why was that?

FOSTER: It just didn't happen. Occasionally a western girl would turn up. Well, there were missionary children there.

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I: But you say that you think inter-marriage was accepted earlier, like before 1900, and after that it wasn't? I wonder what made the difference?

FOSTER: I noticed this also. I am a member of a fraternity and they used to take Jews into this fraternity back in the 19th century. Then somewhere along the line they changed and became very exclusive, white and chauvinistic.

I: I think after World War I there was a big period of increased prejudice in the United States. What about your evaluation of the political awareness of missionaries? Did you think they were pretty aware of the political situation in China or naive?

FOSTER: I can remember lots of political discussions with missionaries. For instance, when Chiang Kai-shek was kidnapped at Christmas time, I think in 1936. This was really very dramatic and I can remember missionaries discussing this and wondering what was going on and being very excited.

I: That must have been big excitement. Did they pretty much back him at that time?

FOSTER: Oh, yes, but I don't think they exactly understood. It was only in talking to people like Agnes Smedley, Anna Louise Strong and the journalists that I really felt that I got to understand something like that myself. I got disgusted with the missionaries (at least the ones I was in contact with) because they always said they had gotten excited about how the Chinese were really going to get ahead and that the Chinese were really going to do something this time. But then they would fail and things would revert to the way they had been before. There never seemed to be any real progress. I guess I got very disheartened by this kind of talk. I really got turned off by this kind of talk. I was really curious about what was going on and trying hard to find out.

I remember finding the Christian Science Monitor in our college library. Apparently, it was sent free of charge. At that time they had correspondence from many missionaries in many parts of China. This was where I first heard about the guerrilla resistance and I think I heard something about the Long March from that. I could have. But that was like an oasis to find these little bits and snippets of dependable news.

After all, the missionaries were just listening to what the Chinese Christians told them and I don't think they knew what was going on. Now, of course, as for the radical student movement, you could really get news from these people. But I don't think that for the most part, we had students like that in our college. I didn't have any access to news from anybody like that. It was when I met Agnes Smedley that I really felt I was getting it on the line, that I was hearing what was really going on and having contact with an entirely different kind of Chinese.

I: So you felt you were sort of cut-off from sources of information?

FOSTER: Yes, I really did.

I: And the missionaries were too, then. I mean the other missionaries.

FOSTER: Yes.

I: There weren't any radical students, then, at Huachung?

FOSTER: No.

I: How do you account for that? It seemed that they were almost everywhere else.

FOSTER: There were some. There was a student movement at Huachung and there were times of unrest, particularly when the Japanese were in China. I can remember the time when I first went out, going around to the students' rooms in this hostel. They had maps of North China and they were showing how the Japanese were coming to China. I can remember discussing this with students. They were very conscious about this. This was also reflected in their themes. I learned a great deal from their themes. There would hardly be a theme in which a student wouldn't say, "If the Japanese ever come to my village, this is what I'm going to do." I really felt that this was a source of information for me. I did learn a lot from the students and their themes. I often thought if I ever did anything for the American government it was because of what I had learned from the Chinese students.

Yet, I'm not sure it's what the American government wanted to learn always. I can remember when I went to meet my wife--when she came out to China with our oldest son--and this consular official that came with her, came up to me on the ship and wanted to know what the Chinese were saying. I repeated what the Chinese in my office were saying: that General Marshall was Chiang Kai-shek's No. 1 houseboy. He was so insulted his mouth just dropped open. He turned on his heel, walked away and didn't say another thing to me.

Another time, when I was a public affairs officer in the Peking Consulate, I was told to go out to the airport and meet Leighton Stuart, who was then ambassador to China, and bring him back, and make sure that no Chinese got anywhere close to him on the way back.

I: Who told you this?

FOSTER: Some secretary in the consulate. I was so upset by this because I felt that we made Leighton Stuart ambassador because he spoke Chinese and could interpret us to the Chinese. You would think they would want him to use his knowledge of Chinese with the Chinese as much as possible. Now, I carried out their instructions because I do what I am told to do, but it just rankled so much. I thought it was so wrong to try to insulate him like that from the Chinese. They should have been pleading with him to speak to the Chinese as much as possible. That should have been his job as far as I am concerned.

I got really upset at things like this. I guess for the most part when these American missionaries got together they would play bridge and they really didn't discuss China so much. They really weren't that interested. You know, in a way they were spreading American imperialism in that they were spreading American standards of living. But I don't think most of them were sensitive to that. A lot of these Episcopalian missionaries had inherited money. They didn't have anything to worry about and they really lived quite well. I really had never seen anything like it among my friends in Faribault. These Episcopalians sent their children to Harvard and things like this. No problem for that.

I: That's a cut above most missionaries, I would say.

FOSTER: But there were exceptions, you see. Bishop Roots had a lot of insight into Chinese politics. He was really quite different. He was friendly with Chou En-lai and people like that. People really respected him. Also, he was friendly with Chiang Kai-shek and I sometimes wondered if the Communists knew that. But this whole thing about whether missionaries were imperialistic or not. That's kind of what you were getting at?

I: Yes.

FOSTER: After the Taiping Rebellion, some of the missionaries were quite pro-Taiping for a while because the Taipings were influenced by Christian work. But in the end I really think they sided with the Manchus. They decided that was where the future lay. So in the end, the Taipings were put down. I think that was too bad for the missionary movement.

I: How about inter-denominational rivalry? Do you think that hindered the missionary movement?

FOSTER: Oh, I think it did. I really had some shocking experiences. There was a big Catholic compound right next to our college: an Italian-Catholic compound. They had been there for several hundred years, much longer than the Episcopalians had. When I was a boy, I always wanted to go into the Catholic church in Faribault. My mother always said if any of her friends saw me coming out of a Catholic church she would be ostracized, so I got the idea this was something very bad to do. But I have had some Catholic friends. I just wanted to go into this Catholic compound in China, and it seemed as though there had been no contact for a hundred years.

The missionaries would ask: "What language would you speak to them?" And I said, "Chinese." I don't know any Italian and if they don't know any English, we could talk Chinese. And then I wanted to do some volunteer work with the YWCA at one time and they refused to let me do that. The Episcopal church refused to let me to that because it wasn't an Episcopalian organization.

I: But you had other denominations that took part in Huachung University.

FOSTER: I know, but you see the Episcopal Church is really quite exclusive.

I: Of course, the Y and the Catholic Church might have been the two extremes.

FOSTER: Yes, right. The Anglicans were all right with whom to get together. And, of course, Yale was all right. Yale has social position, I guess.

I: Is that hitched to any particular denomination?

FOSTER: Sure, it was Congregational. It was anti-Unitarian. It was very Trinitarian. It was started against Harvard.

I: Oh, yes, that's right. So you never did get into the Catholic compound?

FOSTER: No, I never did. You see, now, here in Mankato, we have been going to an ecumenical group with Catholics in it and all. I didn't happen to be there that time, but they actually had a mass and members of our group were encouraged to take mass. This would just have been unheard of.

I: I guess the times are one factor. Did you ever hear any repercussions from the Chinese on denominationalism?

FOSTER: They called the Protestants Yieh Seo Chiao, the Jesus Church, and the Catholics were the Tien Chu Tang, Heavenly Lord Temple. I suppose it would have been very confusing to the Chinese.

I: Although Buddhists are different, too, so it probably wasn't too bad.

FOSTER: But I got to the place where I felt, though I don't know much about Buddhism, that this Episcopal liturgy was quite a bit like some of the Buddhist mumble-jumble. This was probably very bad for the Chinese to have this idea of all this ritual.

I: What is your sort of general evaluation of the missionary movement? Do you think there was something of value in it?

FOSTER: Oh, I really have a feeling that a lot of what is going on in China was, in a sense, inspired by the missionaries. Somehow I wouldn't want to state this in China, but I just think that we did. I think Americans, in general, in the 19th century, were probably much more progressive than they are now, in many ways.

I: You mean the missionaries?

FOSTER: Americans in general. They had a lot of ideas that were much more forward-looking than some Americans have now. I think this really caused a kind of revolution in China. I felt comfortable in a lot of the schools that I went into during my last trip and I didn't think they were really too different from what we were trying to do in our Christian college.

I never made a big thing about doing anything in the name of Jesus. That always seemed very artificial to me. You do it because it is out of your heart. What difference does it make if it is in the name of Jesus or not? I mean, religious fundamentalists seem to get very worried about this. It is very important to them.

I: Evangelization was never your goal?

FOSTER: I don't know if I missed something in the Episcopal Church or maybe it just wasn't in it.

I: Was that generally true in the Episcopal mission?

FOSTER: They certainly don't go in for conversion in the sense that these evangelical or "twice-born" do.

I: So would they consider Christian service as an expression of their beliefs?

FOSTER: I don't think they really would, but that was one kind of an expression. But I got raked over the coals by the mission secretary who told me, in New York, that every time I was in a class I should be very conscious of the fact that I might influence somebody in that class to become a Christian, or something like that.

I: So the mission board was hoping you were converting?

FOSTER: Oh, yes, and this was really much more important than teaching them.

I: But you don't think all the Episcopal missionaries on the field believed this, do you? Or were you unusual?

FOSTER: Maybe I was unusual. This mission secretary also wanted to know if I believed in the virgin birth. He really had a big thing about this. He was so much concerned that I might not believe in this. That sort of thing really upset me. And there are certain things in the Creed that I really never was able to say or feel very happy about. But, I understand that a lot of Episcopalians feel this way; you can't take all these things literally.

I: Right. There is often a division within denominations.

FOSTER: The bishop out there said I should believe in angels. I couldn't be a Christian unless I believed in angels. I never had anybody say anything like that to me before.

I: I think that is one obvious way in which the missionaries differed a great deal. Some were fundamentalists and some were very liberal.

FOSTER: I just about died during the war when we moved west, because it seemed the farther west we went the more fundamental the missionaries there were. The established church and the better-educated missionaries tended to be more near the coast. But back in the Interior I really ran into some wild things. Like, I would be invited in and it would be turned into something else. I thought I was being invited to supper and it would turn into a prayer meeting. People would just suddenly get up, turn around, kneel down and all of a sudden there was just a bunch of fannies around there and they would start praying.

I: Were these Americans?

FOSTER: Yes, and it would suddenly dawn on you that they were praying for you and for your conversion. "Have you been saved in the blood of the Lamb?" I had never had anybody say anything like that to me in the United States. This was just barbaric. I don't know how to react politely when somebody says something like that.

I: You're a liberal missionary. But I think some of the Canadians in the west were not as conservative as the Americans there. The Americans that were there were like Baptist and Alliance.

I: Yes, the Christian Missionary Alliance. I have trouble with people like that. And the American Seventh Day Adventists.

I: There was a great variety of missionaries in China.

FOSTER: In some ways that was good, but I often wondered what the Chinese made of it. I really think that the missionaries didn't do all evil. They did a lot of good. And, I think the Chinese sensed their sincerity and, really, many times they got treated better by Americans than by their own people.

I: You mean by a certain class of Chinese?

FOSTER: Yes.

I: Any more comment on your last trip?

FOSTER: I guess I said in my book that during the first half of my trip, the first 10 days, I was just so wrapped up in what I was seeing I just forgot I had been a missionary there. Then it came to me and I felt kind of guilty that I had forgotten. But really, it seemed to me that what was going on in China was just what a missionary like me was hoping would happen in China sometime: that the Chinese would take hold of things themselves and do these things for themselves. And really, they're doing things that I wish Americans were doing. The experience really overpowered me. I had had these glimpses in these border regions to see what they could do, what the Communists could do when they had control. I was just very curious to see if they were delivering this when they had the whole country. And they were.

And the other thing that impressed me was their plays. Absolutely took me out of it, the spirit--what they were doing with the arts, you see, music and all. I was also curious to see what was happening on the cultural front, more than just the schools.

I: You felt their theater was very lively?

FOSTER: I saw one of these operas. Americans criticize these operas a great deal, but I guess I liked it. I liked it a lot better than the old Chinese theater, the old traditional Chinese theater. But you could see there were some of the same motions. So there was a lot of it still there. But there was certainly a forward-looking purpose to their theater.

I: Did you like it more than the other people in your group?

FOSTER: No, I don't think so. They were just fascinated by it, as far as I could see. A lot of them were from New York and more conscious of this sort of thing and more knowledgeable. So I figured if they liked it it probably was all right for me, like from a technical point.

But the Chinese are criticized for these operas. Shirley Maclaine asked Teng Ying-chiao, Madame Chou En-lai, how China would treat a potential Michelangelo that might be born in China. Shirley MacLaine was really negative about it. I liked her movie on the trip for the most part. And I find I've had the worst reaction from my music and art faculty friends when I have talked at the college about China.

I: Because the Americans take such an individualistic approach to life?

FOSTER: And they seem to think that an artist must be at cross-purposes with his society. If you like the government, which the Chinese do, then somehow they are being brainwashed, according to such American individualists.

I: It's a little different concept of the function of the artist.

FOSTER: Yes, it really is. We'll add a little bit here on the National Peasant Movement Institute in Canton. This is one of the places that we visited when I returned to China two years ago. I was very much interested in this because I had seen the other end of the Northern Expedition in Wuchang in the late 1930s. The Communists and Chiang Kai-shek formed the first United Front to unify China and

put down the warlords. They started this movement in Canton. The immediate aim when they marched north was Wuchang, where I went in 1934 about five years after it fell to this Northern Expedition. And I had heard stories there, from the missionaries, about the seige and about how hard it was on the Chinese within the city. Naturally, they weren't really very sympathetic with this revolutionary movement. But when I was in Canton, we were taken to see the National Peasant Movement Institute where the cadres had been trained. Mao Tse-tung brought in peasants from all over South China--I guess even some from North China. They were trained in the mass movement on how to help the armies march north and mobilize peasants to help the army.

But this institute was an old Confucian temple that, even in the 1920s, was not used as a Confucian temple. It must have already been nationalized. It was set up as a school and more or less restored the way it had been there. We saw the dormitories where the peasants slept, the classrooms where Mao and other teachers trained them and the library. We saw Mao's own room where he studied and slept.

What struck me was that it really wasn't too different from our Christian college. It must have been cold in the wintertime; but our college was cold in the wintertime, particularly when we moved into Southwest China in this village of Hsichow, where our library took over the Confucian temple. The temple was still being used for worship. On Confucius' birthday we had to close the library down. They moved into the temple and killed a pig and carried on the Confucian rites. Then we used the Buddhist temple for some classrooms. We lived in homes--the teachers lived in homes of the gentry around Hsichow and we built some dormitories for the students. But I don't really think that our students lived a much better life than those peasants did in that institute at Canton. So I thought that was an interesting comparison.

I: It is a very interesting comparison. Thank you for adding that.

FOSTER: Do you want me to add something about Feng Yu-hsiang?

I: Yes.

FOSTER: When I was in Chungking in 1943 and the first part of 1944, at some point in the period when I was working with the USIS, I was asked if I would teach English to Feng Yu-hsiang. I must have gone there once a week for several months, at least, to teach him English. I don't really remember too much about it except that he was a great big, fat, hearty man and was extremely friendly. I don't feel that I got very far in teaching him English. But it was interesting to have that contact with him because at that time he was still very independent of the Chinese government and Chiang Kai-shek. He must have been affiliated with something like the Democratic League, a kind of a third group. I don't think he was a member of the Kuomintang.

I: Could he have been just an independent power?

FOSTER: Yes, and there must have been some orderlies around. I don't think he had any troops there. I think he started off to the Soviet Union sometime in there. That's maybe what broke off the contact. In fact, he may have been preparing to come to the United States and wanted to brush up on his English. I'm just a little vague about that, but at least he seemed to want a foreign contact and he didn't mind that I was working for the American government.

I: I'm sorry that our time has come to an end. The information that you have been able to give us is appreciated.